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United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities

Report of the Secretary-General

1. In its resolution 70/84 on persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, after consulting with the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), to report on the progress made with regard to the implementation of the resolution. The present report is submitted to the Assembly pursuant to that request.

2. On 20 July 2016, the Secretary-General addressed a note verbale to the Permanent Representatives of Member States to the United Nations, including the Permanent Representative of Israel, in which he drew attention to his reporting responsibility under resolutions 70/83 to 70/86 and requested them to inform him of any action that their Governments had taken or envisaged taking in the implementation of the relevant provisions of the resolutions.

3. In a note verbale dated 15 August 2016, the Permanent Mission of Israel replied as follows:

> The Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to refer to his note concerning resolutions 70/83-86 adopted by the General Assembly on 15 December 2015, at its seventieth session, under the agenda item "United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East".
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> Notwithstanding Israel's ongoing support for the humanitarian activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), it decided to vote against resolutions 70/83-86. Israel remains concerned by the political motivation behind the aforesaid resolutions and is

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disturbed by the fact that they present a one-sided view which fails to reflect the reality on the ground.

As a consequence of the political nature of these resolutions, UNRWA has taken it upon itself to promote the Palestinian narrative and to use humanitarian funding for the purpose of advocacy. There is no shortage of advocacy organizations for the Palestinian cause and Israel strongly objects to this blatant misuse by UNRWA of the funds the international community donates for the welfare of Palestinian refugees.

Israel supports a consolidation of UNRWA resolutions and a removal of all extraneous political language. Moreover, Israel urges the Secretary-General and UNRWA to consider, together with the concerned parties, ways in which the United Nations can enhance the manner in which it advances the welfare of the Palestinian people.

In this respect, Israel strongly supports the application of the standard principles which guide the United Nations with respect to the treatment of refugees elsewhere, to the Palestinian situation. Specifically, the mandate of UNRWA should be consistent with the standard United Nations policy on refugees. Furthermore, the mandate of UNRWA should include the active promotion of the broadly applied United Nations goals of resettlement and local integration of refugees in the Palestinian context.

While other refugee populations not under the mandate of UNRWA have seen a gradual decrease in their numbers commensurate with their rehabilitation into civilian life, the Palestinian refugee population is growing at an exponential rate (from 700,000 in 1949 to 4.2 million in 2005, to 5.2 million in 2015, and due to reach 6.2 million in 2020). It seems that UNRWA as an organization does not aspire to create a solution to the refugee problem and rehabilitate the refugees, but rather merely to "freeze" and perpetuate their current status. The politically motivated nature of resolutions 70/83-86 only reinforces this agenda.

Palestinian refugees (now into their fourth generation) are reliant on international aid and funds for their health, education and livelihood. The aspiration to maintain the political issue at the expense of the humanitarian needs of the refugees, as reflected in the resolutions, is also evident from the realities on the ground: a clear example of that is the fact that the Palestinian Authority refuses to take responsibility for providing services to the refugee population in areas under its complete control, insisting upon UNRWA "exclusivity" in that respect.

Despite an ongoing and acute threat to its security, Israel has gone to great lengths to foster conditions for Palestinian economic development and cooperation, approving a substantial number of UNRWA projects and facilitating UNRWA humanitarian assistance to its Palestinian beneficiaries.

Furthermore, despite these acute security threats, Israel is actively working to support reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip. Israel has intensified its cooperation with the international community and with the Palestinian Authority to facilitate sustainable infrastructural and economic development in Gaza, in order to meet both the short-term and long-term needs of the civilian population. Since October 2014, over 5 million tons of building material have

been transferred to Gaza, including 872,000 tons of cement and 157,000 tons of iron.

A total of 130,000 homes that were partially damaged during Operation Protective Edge have been approved for repair. Of these, repairs have already been completed on over 80,000, and more than 20,000 are under way.

The second stage of Gaza's reconstruction has begun, with almost 13,000 residential units authorized for complete reconstruction, and for over 2,500 of them, all the necessary building material to start work has already been purchased. Additionally, 790 public projects such as roads, schools, clinics and mosques have been approved; 124 of them have already been completed.

As part of the humanitarian effort, and parallel to the increase in the crossing of commercial goods, there was an increase in the number of people crossing at the Erez crossing in 2015. Over 360,000 crossings, including of patients going for treatment in Israel, students, worshippers going for Friday prayers on Temple Mount, family members of prisoners going for visits and an increased number of 5,000 businessmen with daily permits, entered Israel. All this is taking place while the Egyptian Rafah crossing is closed during most of the year, due to the Palestinian Authority's continuous refusal to assume its responsibilities over the crossings.

Israel has undertaken these measures, and many more, despite the major security risks they pose. Hamas, an internationally recognized terrorist organization, has diverted massive amounts of aid and imported goods for use in its terrorist infrastructure. For instance, building materials worth tens of millions of dollars were diverted by Hamas for the construction of cross-border tunnels, which were used to attack Israel during the summer 2014 conflict. Hamas continues to pursue its efforts to rearm, expand its rocket arsenal and construct its infrastructure in preparation for future attacks against Israel.

It is unacceptable that resources intended to better the lives of the residents of Gaza are being used instead for terror activities aimed at harming the citizens of Israel. Israel fully supports the humanitarian efforts of the United Nations and other aid agencies and stresses the importance of ensuring that such activities are not being used and abused by terror organizations.

While Israel continues to assiduously assist the reconstruction of Gaza, these efforts are hindered by outside forces. Delays in reconstruction predominantly stem from the actions of Hamas, the de facto ruler of Gaza, and its conflict with the Palestinian Authority. For example, Hamas refuses to allow the Palestinian Authority to take security and civilian responsibility for the Palestinian side of Gaza's border crossings with Israel and Egypt. For its part, the Palestinian Authority wants to weaken the Hamas regime, and this goal appears to be influencing the pace and extent of its reconstruction activities.

As indicated in the recent report of the Middle East Quartet, the continued control of the terrorist organization Hamas over Gaza is impeding the reconstruction of Gaza. It should be emphasized that any future Palestinian government must abide by the principles of the International Quartet: it must renounce violence, recognize Israel and abide by prior agreements. Palestinian incitement to terrorism must stop.

4. In connection with paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 70/84, the Secretary-General has obtained from the Commissioner-General of UNRWA the information available to him on the return of refugees registered with the Agency to the occupied Palestinian territory. As indicated in previous reports on the subject, UNRWA is not involved in any arrangements for the return of refugees, nor is it involved in any arrangements for the return of displaced persons who are not registered as refugees. Its information is based on requests by returning registered refugees for the transfer of their UNRWA registration records from Jordan, Lebanon or the Syrian Arab Republic to the areas where they have returned. The Agency would not necessarily be aware of the return of any registered refugees who did not request the transfer of their registration records. So far as is known to the Agency, from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016, 315 refugees registered with UNRWA returned to the West Bank and 181 to the Gaza Strip from places outside the occupied Palestinian territory. It should be noted that some of those may not have been displaced in 1967, but may have been displaced in earlier or later years or may be members of the family of a displaced registered refugee. Thus, taking into account the estimate given in paragraph 3 of the previous report concerning persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities (A/70/308), the number of displaced registered refugees who are known by the Agency to have returned to the occupied territory since June 1967 is 36,606. UNRWA is unable to estimate the total number of displaced inhabitants who have returned. It keeps records only of registered refugees and other registered persons[1] and, as noted above, even those records, in particular with regard to the location of registered refugees and other registered persons, may be incomplete.

5. In connection with paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 70/84, the Secretary-General refers to the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2015 (A/71/13) and to the previous reports of the Commissioner-General for accounts of the ongoing assistance provided by UNRWA to persons displaced and in need of continued assistance.

[1] "Other registered persons" refers to those who, at the time of original registration, did not satisfy all of the Agency's criteria for "Palestine refugee", but who were determined to have suffered significant loss and/or hardship for reasons relating to the 1948 conflict in Palestine; it also includes persons who belong to the families of other registered persons.